

"I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go." - President Abraham Lincoln

I'm exhausted. I wasn't good at pulling "all-nighters" when I was in college. Now, at age 55, my resilience from such things is even less. Congress had an all-nighter Friday night, after a "most of the nighter" on Thursday. Just before 5 AM Saturday morning, after being in session and voting for 20 straight hours, and after 90 hours of debate on over 600 amendments, the House passed a bill to fund the federal government from March 5th until September 30, 2011 spending about \$62 billion less than last year. But, more important than my physical depletion is the profound melancholy I feel right now. Yes, a spending bill passed that actually reduces spending. Many of my colleagues who have been around much longer than I have remind me that it is a huge shift to talk about how much we are going to cut instead of how to slow the rate of increase. I get that. But, if you are in a car heading for a cliff, it is not enough to apply the brakes if that braking is insufficient to keep you from going over the cliff. You must brake hard. It looks like Wisconsin Governor Walker is doing that in Madison. But, we are not doing it in Washington. I think America is ready to do what is necessary to avoid national fiscal collapse and calamity. But, I'm not sure Congress is there yet.

The vote was 235-189. Every Democrat voted against it. That surprised and disappointed me. The cuts are not that deep and I would have thought that a few of the remaining "blue dogs" who often speak about fiscal sanity would have voted yes. I was one of 3 Republicans to vote no. We all voted no because it did not reduce spending enough. I thought there might have been a few more to join our little band of rebels.

The details of the debate and votes on the amendments shed some light on why I fear that, even after the 2010 elections, the enormous inertia of Congress to spend has not yet been overcome. The Republican Chairman of the Appropriations Committee (Hal Rogers, R-KY) opposed 17 of the first 18 amendments that reduced spending. All 17 he opposed lost. These included a 25% reduction in the cost of boards and commissions in the Department of Defense, a cost reduction suggested by the Secretary of Defense. But, no, we will make them spend the additional \$18 million. The defeat of that amendment was, in my opinion, a seminal moment. In fact, only one spending reduction to the Defense Department's budget passed all week. An amendment offered by Jim Jordan (R-OH) and cosponsored by yours truly would have reduced non-security spending to 2008 levels. It failed by a vote of 147-281, meaning that some 40% of Republicans in addition to all Democrats opposed it. This cost saving measure had nothing to do with security. It is not a big stretch to ask the government to spend at levels spent just 2 years ago when there has been little intervening inflation.

I could go on, but it will only depress me more to relive it all. Now, the bill goes to the Senate where it will only get worse. The road from here is uncertain and will be played out over the next few months as we encounter deadlines and debt limits and such.

Further, I understand that nothing we pass in the House will make it through the Senate and through this President. But, I wish we would show the other arms of government and the American people that at least the House is willing to lead us boldly away from the darkness. We need to get there soon.

Many of you thank me for writing these missives. I thank you for reading them. They are, frankly, therapeutic for me to write almost in the fashion of a diary. It is a long 6 hour flight home to California now. The flight is often lonely and the skies outside are usually dark. Some trips are longer, lonelier, and darker than others. This was never a job I sought. But, it is one in which I feel my role is an important one. I know God is there with me somewhere. It is His guidance and His strength that sustains me. But, it is nice to know that many of you are there with me too. I thank you for your faithful readership, your support, and your prayers.